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Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

When you plagiarize, you use someone else's words, ideas, and/or images without acknowledging the source within your essay. You may have previously learned "rules" which tell you that you don't need to use quotation marks or cite your source unless you "borrow" at least four consecutive words – but the truth is that anytime you use words and ideas that are not your own, you need to cite the source. Purchasing or downloading essays is also a form of plagiarism since the work you hand in is not your own. In addition, turning in work written for other classes (including your high school English classes) without both instructors' permission is considered "self-plagiarism" and could result in penalty.

How do I know if I am plagiarizing?

Plagiarism is often accidental and is always avoidable. Lester Faigley's *The Little Penguin Handbook* discusses some "common errors" associated with plagiarism (57):

- The author fails to attribute a quotation to the person who uttered it (either in speech or writing).
- What the writer considers a paraphrase is actually a direct quotation since so many of the words come not from the writer, but from the source.
- A source is not included on the works cited page.
- Images (including advertising, graphs, charts, etc.) are used without citing the source.

Note that quotation marks, signal phrases, and parenthetical citations generally address these problems.

What are the consequences?

Plagiarism can result in serious penalties. According to the The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities:

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you risk:

- Receiving an F in the course and being removed from the class.
- A referral to the Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities with a probable disciplinary sanction ranging from Probation [until your] graduation, Suspension or Expulsion.

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- A disciplinary file/record and transcript notation (not the box you want to check on graduate school applications, and they all ask).
- Your personal reputation in the/your Department. Do you want to be known as a “cheater”? How will this reflect on you when you are attempting to transition into your profession?
- Disappointing your parents, family and most importantly... yourself!

ENGL 134 instructors have clearly stated plagiarism policies on their syllabi. While instructors may handle the incident differently within the course (e.g.: you may fail the assignment and/or the class), they will report you to the Office of Academic Affairs.

How should I read essays that cite sources?

As you read the essays in this collection, focus on how students use sources to support their own ideas. In particular, note how they introduce and quote sources, paraphrase, summarize, and integrate quotations with signal phrases. In addition, don't skip over the works cited page at the end of essays. Rather, focus on how this page supplements the essay: every source cited in the essay needs to appear here. Learning how to incorporate and cite sources properly helps to build your credibility with your readers. While you may learn a different citation style in your major, the key is to know how to work with outside sources.

Works Cited

Faigley, Lester. *The Little Penguin Handbook*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. 56–62.

“Don't Risk It.” Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. 11 June 2007
<http://osrr.calpoly.edu/dont_risk_it.html>.